THE TIME BY DIALING

Myron H. Broomell

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From several hundred poems which have already appeared in well-known literary magazines and anthologies, a mature poet has sifted this first collection of his work—poems that are technically assured, fresh, incisive . . .

The Time by Dialing

By MYRON H. BROOMELL

Broomell is primarily a lyric poet. To this form he brings a style founded firmly on the classical tradition and a range of thought that is keenly modern —searching, evocative, astringent. . .

"Apart from the fact of spontaneous impulse," Broomell says, "I have tried to write poetry because it seemed to afford some synthesis in a life otherwise difficult to summarize." For the reader also, these poems, both psychological and didactic, provide an equal synthesis —an original, reasoned view of modern society in ferment.

(*Continued on back flap*)

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The Time by Dialing

THE TIME BY DIALING

Myron H. Broomell

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CONTENTS

I

The Time by Dialing 9

The Temporalities 10

For a Septennial Anniversary 11

From Under the Airway 12

II

The Banquet 15

Sonnet 16

We Must Write Often 17

The Dream 18

Four Sonnets 19

The Reminiscence 21

III

An Antinomy 25

Of Providence 26

The Coat 27

Reminiscence of Childhood 28

On Slumber in the West 29

A Professor of History 30

Entry in My Journal 31

Precaution 32

Item in the Paper 33

On My Shoulders 34

Friday, Last Lecture 35

The Death of the Body 36

U. S. 41 37

International Date Line 38

The Defection 39

IV

Common Denominator 45

The Vows 45

How Was the Show? 46

The God Errant 47

Kenilworth Stairway 48

Tristan in Brittany 49

The Virtues 50

A Lease Surrendered 51

The Madman 52

Cabinet with Mirror 53

Marriage, or the Gist of Swedenborg 54

V

Three Poems from a Defense Plant 57

Still Life 59

Lines for Ponce de Leon 60

✲ I ✲

THE TIME BY DIALING

To HER who says that at the tone
The time will be what now has flown
(And in the twinkling of an eye
They hear her who cannot reply
But listen dumb as through the wire
There comes the voice that counts for hire
And cares as little as the time
That ticks away from chime to chime)
We do not matter who depend
On minutes to define our end,

But were that voice responsive still
As one might bend by wish or will
(And through the instrument devised
By the half-deaf whose name is prized
The man turned master might command
Time to behave by sleight-of-hand
And she be suddenly in love
With whom she is oblivious of)—
Yet were there underneath and known
The water eating out the stone.

THE TEMPORALITIES

In the mountains the houses neither age nor die.
The paint, the wood, are neither new nor old.
White is not brilliant against winter sky
Nor moss-green loud against a tree in gold.
Nor are they shabby, either, where wind washes
The bone-dry clapboards and the flaking sashes.

As I came around the corner of one such,
Suddenly that was where there is no time.
It had tough grass in the dooryard, but not much,
And one thin vine that would not die nor climb.
With a slight breathing I could outlive the brave
Or say Hi! to my grandsire forty years in his grave.

FOR A SEPTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

THEY say that by the seventh year
The substance of a man has changed,
And other flesh than once was here
On other bone is now arranged;

That not a fleck of matter clings
To its same fellow, and the cells
That once were I have taken wings,
And all is new that in me dwells.

So am I neither, at this last,
The body beating like a drum,
Nor the same blood that crowded fast
Upon the heart when night was come;

Nor yet the labyrinthine brain,
Perceiving, then, how you were love,
And love was only you again,
And was too close for thinking of.

Thus now transmuted, what am I?
And since this body knew you not,
How does its yearning still comply
With the unaltered shape of thought?

And how, since all our yesterdays
Were in a year it never knew,
Does it in contemplation blaze
With the indwelling flame of you?

FROM UNDER THE AIRWAY

UNDER the smoke that roofs it from heavenly eyes,
Full of lost souls and the famine of self-pity,
Full of young men and the streets of enterprise,
Lies the great city.

Far from these fields sun-bright on the wide plain
Of the land-ocean rolling green and still,
The towers of art and value that pall sustain,
White shafts in a somber hill.

Air-borne, the earth-bound, silver-winging thither,
Catching the last rays yet in the shadowing sky,
Wither and vanish, darkly homing whither
I know not why.

✲ II ✲

THE BANQUET

QUIET against the sunset as though now
One lived indeed in the last days of the world,
The enamored watcher's dangerous hope of safety
Sat in a tempest of stillness and pure dream.
The crowded room discreetly and softly pearled
With amber globes to ward the gathering dark
Grew empty of all except the perfect illusion.
Beyond the windows tall and wide behind her
The remnant of day died in a calm profusion
Of colored light without one central spark;
Like a green terrace at the edge of nothing
Remotely lay the interjacent fields.

Counting, rejecting one by one the words
That would not fit and never could suffice,
He noted well, as if to know forever,
The eloquent hand, the glamorous device
Of hair cascading to the arrogant shoulder,
And how the eyes, wiser because much older,
Said (what was true), *Now we go on together,*
I the same image, you the same beholder,
And you remembering while I forget.

The night was quiet afterward; the days
As quiet, too, moved soundlessly and fast
Where all that happened had been long ordained.
Memory burning was a kind of praise,
A beacon lighted for a victory gained
Over a moment not designed to last
Except in purely hypothetic ways.
The splendor lingered; only the dark was feigned.

SONNET

STILL hold me close; all is not over yet;
There are three words that have not yet been said:
The formula a man should not omit,
The sanction that a woman must have had.
Say, if you will, *You're swell,* or, *That was perfect,*
Or, *This could last forever without surfeit;*
Still is the spell not cast, the curse averted,
Without *I love you* spoken gentle-hearted.

Then if you say, *I did this in a dream,*
Or I, *Not mine the doing, the undoing,*
You can not make it other than the same,
Nor I deny it so lightly by that showing:
If once the words bind fast what random plans,
The shrine may fall—the consecration stands.

WE MUST WRITE OFTEN

Little by little everything fades out—
First the expression of the vivid face,
And then the light that lay behind the eyes.
The mouth, its contours, longer resist doubt,
But then are gone, and only in their place
Something not memory, that them belies.
Afterward all that keeps the image quick
Is the vague trait of carriage through a room—
The way the body leaned, the carmine stick
Lifted against the lips, the one perfume
Was stippled there and there, and then the shoulder
Leaned to the cloak. In those days one was bolder—
Eye being bright with love and little sleep,
The occasion tense, the moment snatched from fate,
The face a flower arranged that might not keep,
The errand urgent and the danger great:
And always there was wine still in the glass,
And kisses not yet tried, and other drink;
And sometimes war excited every heart.
Now it fades out: the flavor of the brass,
The sound of scent, the feeling when you think,
The color of the body's conscious art.

THE DREAM

A STRANGE weather that made the night too warm
For so late an hour of the year or so late an hour,
Followed the track followed by the great storm.
In moonlight, in the field, I saw a flower.

Night should not show, nor autumn, nor the moon,
The hand a blossom nor the feet a way
To pluck, to wander, and conceal so soon.
Suddenly it was cloudy, cold, and day.

FOUR SONNETS

AFTER HARVEST

SINCE at some time the fleshly sensations fade,
The kiss is gone before its lasting message.
The humble body, when the load is weighed,
Is soon unyoked. Meanwhile the heart pays pesage.
The toll was heavy—for the grain was much,
The wain laborious and not quickly come by;
The weigher balanced with a clumsy touch,
The chafferer was new and bargained dumbly.
And since the business rankles, the man frets
Still when the beast is stalled, the grain unladen;
He mumbles prices and laments the weevil.
But sleep at length is restful; he forgets.
So I keep only of a once live maiden
A faint impression of contemptible evil.

OF JUDGMENT

I WOULD not call you light; you are not that,
Who weigh too heavy in the scale of shame;
Nor empty, who held much to shudder at
After one learned to call it by its name;
Nor can I call you vicious, to whom vice
Was virtue's fellow—a bird and another bird
Heard chirp in twilight by an ear not nice.
There ought to be some quainter, juster word.
There ought to be some touch of pity in it,
Some true admission of how fair you seemed
In the irrevocable, age-long minute
Before you grew so wholly disesteemed.
It should confess, this word I do not find,
How hungry you once found me, and how blind.

THE PLEADERS

WHEN we are come to judgment, you and I,
The one to answer for a fault unconscious,
The other for still summoning what is by;
When you have offered the plea unpretentious,
And I have claimed my specious constancy
And set it up against your simple caption
That makes an ordinary jape of me
For raveling an elaborate corruption:
In that hard cause, whose trial might consume
Time out of mind and not be well decided,
I shall appeal to nuance and perfume;
You will recite *It could not be avoided.*
Pleading in different tongues, each will aver
Betrayal by an erring interpreter.

IN STORE

THE RENDEZVOUS you think you will not keep
Is not with death nor ruin. These you know
May any day surprise you in your sleep,
Or startle the wide eye with a tableau.
Nor do you think forever to avoid
The traveler age, with whom we all fall in—
With whose society Cato was not annoyed,
And whose approval Paris could not win.
The meeting that you reckon to escape
Is less condign than any one of these;
Yet it might give them odds on its strange shape
And the swift way that it could banish ease:
I mean the encounter, dread as with an elf,
When one day you shall turn and see yourself.

THE REMINISCENCE

In a bar in a city whose name I forget
(It lay beyond a river of jet)
On a night unmerciful long ago,
I met a man you wouldn't know.
I didn't know him and he didn't know me;
So I could talk and so could he.
A few clichés and a burst of speech
Revealed us brothers each to each.

I say I don't remember the town,
But I know the wind was coming down
From around a mountain or off a plain
In a way I hope it doesn't again.
Before the besom of the wind
The chaff was flying: the grain was binned.
Twisting and drifting from curb to curb,
The chaff was noun for a stranger's verb.

The drink no less than the allegory
Warmed the too inconspicuous story
That kept the veins of memory warm.
The words competed with the storm.
The wind went past and the wind went round
With an instructive shrieking sound,
And the voice that spoke by grace of mind
Rehearsed the demon that works behind.

The circumstances, the special facts,
The pattern of the days and acts,
The parting of the culprit's hair,
The shape of the scars she made one wear,
The way the wounds were dealt, the way
They multiplied by night and day—
These, as Cicero says, I pass over
As matters varied from lover to lover;

Suffice it now—for an audience
In love with brevity, propense
To the essential image mirroring
The absolute and the unvarying—
To put the truth dèrivable
From an excursion into hell
In words said then and somewhat poignant yet:
The bad women are the hardest to forget.

✲ III ✲

AN ANTINOMY

THE HEART being dead, the mind must carry on.
It is as if the shed skin of the snake
Should keep its motion and be still alive,
Possessing form and semblance—but were gone
The dangerous colors and the eyes awake,
And the slow coils that sudden death contrive.

But if the mind have ceased to body forth
The motions of the heart in copious Form—
When words have failed, and only time is kind:
What image then shall capture the true worth
Of that imprisoned, self-consuming storm,
The aimless lightnings and the thunder blind?

OF PROVIDENCE

For sleeping dogs we ventured to disturb,
For cooler weather promised after rain,
For squealing brakes and giggles from the curb,
For unguents advertised as good for pain,

For checks from home expected some time soon,
For pleasure hoped from seeing former cronies,
For jests whose harmlessness would none impugn,
For confidence in creeds and ceremonies,

For love supposed to last beyond the day,
For penny banks we meant to fill at last,
For postcards due from friends who were away,
For times we said the worst was surely past,

For summer days and planning to return,
For girls we never thought we'd have to marry,
For lessons taught us that we've still to learn—
We thank our luck: they taught us to be wary.

But for all fates that overtook good men,
For gains thereby and losses made the best of,
For beasts encountered in the lonely glen,
For omens flown too fast to make a test of,

For foreign wars, and noiseless wars at home,
For crack-ups that the doctors could not save,
For seas with neither wind nor wave nor foam—
Thanks for these too: they taught us to be brave.

THE COAT

THE FOREFEET with which we kick and call it striking,
Or tie catgut knots inside the tiny matchbox,
Or play Beethoven or something of Pasternak's,
Define us as persons to whom others take a liking;
Gregarious, human, not unclumsy with leagues,
Subject to tiresomely various fatigues.

Fitly surviving, the furless variation
Warmed himself with his brain, that doubtful privilege.
Fire, skins, and the responsibilities of villeinage
Institutionalized what conveniently seemed the nation.
Those who shivered as the wind came off the moor
Were only dreamers or the very poor.

But which first disappeared—the lack of mind,
Or that so comforting coat of the animal kind?

Now and again the fur we had when young
Appears sporadic on a thought or tongue.

" 'Dear Hairy,' " wrote the humorist, and threw
His readers into gales of the not-quite-true.

REMINISCENCE OF CHILDHOOD

THERE was a comet. We couldn't make head or tail of it.
It streaked the sky in plenty—oh, plenty—of time.
There were too many columnists and no prophets
To set us straight the year the comet came.

Then, you could never tell anybody anything.
People were shrewd. They knew it was propaganda.
The baby's fever was normal; it came from teething.
The poor baby grew up with a lame leg and a

Perpetual furrow vertical between the eyebrows
On reaching manhood—if that was what it reached.
Each family had herbs hung up in its own house:
For thrift, thistle; for poison, the stone of a peach.
Its own lore was more than enough for each.

We had our own lore and a comet too,
Standing next door beyond the oak and elm.
A new blight had just begun to chew
The leaves yellow. They fell in a dead calm.

ON SLUMBER IN THE WEST

LEST I should hear the eagle scream,
I laid me down to sleep and dream.
And while I slumbered those awoke
Who cried no truce with sleeping folk.

Plunder they eyed in portions three—
For one the land, for one the sea,
For one the treasures underground:
While I slept on and heard no sound.

But after all my sleep was done
The eagle screamed from sun to sun.
The world interminably wide
Disclosed no room where I might hide.

February, 1939

A PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

If I should suddenly break down
And tell my classes what I think,
I should be living on the town,
And much too poor to take to drink.

If in the midst of the events
That signalized the reign of James,
I should depart from the past tense,
People would call me funny names.

If in the hour that fills the sky
And lowers over England's isle,
I should betray what I live by,
Chaos would reign, and no man smile.

December, 1940

ENTRY IN MY JOURNAL

We live, indeed, from day to day
On news from Europe, and to hear
What move is Russia's, and what play
From Munich realigns the year;
Encouraging, by auspices
Remotely taken, the dear hope
That some obscure event in Fez
May promise things of wider scope;
Discerning little of the cause
That makes one basket of the scales
Rise in despite of the known laws,
And sink when the brief impulse fails.

We live like hounds alert in hall
To morsels from the master's board,
Lifting expectant muzzles all
For the flung fragments of the sword.

December 25, 1940

PRECAUTION

WHERE there is any light, it is phosphorescence.
The bulbs that burn from current over a wire,
The uncanny tubes of shivering incandescence,
Are now put out lest they draw hostile fire.

And yet the moon betraying lake and river,
The ocean of trees, the city spread like a fan,
Returns the light set free by the Lightgiver.
Where there is darkness it is made by man.

April, 1941

ITEM IN THE PAPER

THE MAN in the flat across the street
Has killed himself, the coroner says.
He kept hearing marching feet,
Roar of tanks, the drone of planes,
The rattle of machine-gun fire,
Explosions shattering a thousand panes,
And afterward the sudden silences.
There went through his head as he lay trying to sleep
A procession of pictures from picture magazines—
The dive-bomber sloping for the downward sweep,
The destroyer with decks awash, the bursting ship,
The ruined city, the cannon under screens,
The torpedo's track and the shell's trajectory
Outlined in foam or smoke like the mark of a whip,
The families huddled in the vaulted refectory
Because self-preservation is a basic desire.

He also heard and saw from day to day
Over the air and in the cold black print
The words the commentators found to say—
The charge, the exhortation, and the hint,
The formula to wish the world away.
On these he would have fed if they were food,
But that grew madness that had been a mood,
And some solution seemed the thing to find.
This preyed upon his mind.

Average people are much more stable.
They only bicker at the dinner table.

May, 1941

ON MY SHOULDERS

THE MOUSE with blood-red teeth that gnaws
My spirit intermittently
In disregard of the good laws
That wish me spiritually free
Was not originally born
My bane nor my compatriot
But hither migrant and forlorn
Some while was mendicant till glut
Of opportunity and meat
Exalted him to be my doom,
A special trouble and discrete,
A death shut up in a small room.

I think it all began the day
They took the other book away
And put before me the black book
In which I was a fool to look,
That tells of east and west and skies
Falling before an empire dies.
When I had looked, I could not read.
The page had come alive indeed.

September, 1941

FRIDAY, LAST LECTURE

We have tried to sum up the various forces at work
In the period after the peace, the epoch of anger.
We have seen pacts formed, and pacts that were not sub-
Statesmen succumbing to an ethical languor, [scribed;
And amateurs who stood at one side and jibed;
And, at first in the background, the figure with the bludg-
The helmeted man who carried the helpful dirk, [eon,
The small ambitious who muffled himself in dudgeon,
And the silent person whom conscience did not irk.

From our vantage point of knowing how all ended
We have viewed the gestures that faith and charity made
With detachment suited to the clearer vision
That comes from looking on a naked blade;
And we have felt justified in our derision,
Seeing what troubles followed, seeing that storm
Arose in a quarter where the sun descended
Behind clouds even then beginning to form.
We of some shrewdness would have known what wind
impended.

It remains, then, to formulate the laws
By which the subject of study shall own our science.
No more, now that the truth is discerned,
Are we to be troubled by that stubborn defiance
The world displayed the day before we learned.
Before the bell rings, then: before the final
Examination, which will cover both fact and cause:
We might touch briefly on God (were it not too banal),
Or devote a word to the neighbor (if we knew who he
was).

September, 1941

THE DEATH OF THE BODY

THE RHINOCEROS charging, when it meets the lead,
Seems not exactly as though being killed.
It skids and nose-dives, bounces and rolls dead—
More like a car wrecked than beast bullet-filled.
For a moment its four legs were in the air—
Thick, like wheels upward; tough with miles of wear.

Not so the stiff giraffe, who buckles, falling,
Like a kicked clothes-rack; like a brittle grove
Snapped by the wrong wind when the smoke was crawling.
The yellow angles crack and do not move.
The ungainly grace folds up like a pocket-knife
When the tall giraffe crumples without life.

Man is two-footed. Dead he falls and lies
With sky in his face or mud under his eyes.

U. S. 41

TONIGHT the under-going sun
Makes a dusk that counts as one
Thin hour before the actual dark.
Southward the directions run.

By berm and line as through a groove,
Certain as pure fate we move,
Whose stopping-place can none predict,
None our latest error prove.

The highway sudden as a fist
Leans ahead and fades in mist;
Pelts us with yellow globes from gray
Azure and lead amethyst.

November, 1941

INTERNATIONAL DATE LINE

BEYOND our west, mid-oceaned with the sun,
Our own lost yesterday has hours to run,
While eastward, slowly over darkness winning,
Long hours ago tomorrow was beginning.

December, 1941

THE DEFECTION

My friend, who was my pupil once,
Has turned against the noise of guns.
He hears them threatening all fronts
And goes to join the Peaceful Ones,
Who bid the righteous ground his arms
Because no good can come of Force,
And for the wicked deck the charms
Of Grace to ogle his remorse.
He is my pupil now no more
To whom I did not teach in time
The story of the easy whore
Whom no one thanked who paid her crime,
But when she made her favors free,
None was so spat upon as she.

Pupil no more, but still my friend—
Because I think he leans to ill,
I ask of him the will to spend
A thought on ends for which men kill.
For first in Abel and in Cain
The deed had happened, before Rome
Saw thunder gathering in Spain
To pour forth Hannibal at home.
Death was as ancient as the hand
Of king on scepter, sire on son.
It has been dealt in every land
Where good or bad has lost or won.
No man but houses in his blood
The slain assailant clutching mud.

Of old it was the people's creed
That in a battle fought for ground,
For home, for honor, for the seed
Of great dominion, for the sound
Of the true faith on heathen lips,
For credit in a woman's sight—
God favored one man's host or ships,
And one was wrong and one was right.
But now no longer. It is said
A sacredness investing peace
Incriminates alike the dead,
The slayers, and the warning geese
Who save a careless Capitol
Crept up upon by the fierce Gaul.

It was that same hill at whose edge
Tarpeia, drawing from the spring,
Saw Sabine gold and took the pledge
That meant a bracelet and a ring
To her, a single-minded girl
Intent upon the simplest good,
Not dreaming Sabine men would hurl
Their shields to crush her where she stood;
Not knowing whether, in some year
When Roman friend and Sabine foe
Alike had passed beyond the fear
A living nation needs to know,
It might not matter which of them
Died for Tarpeia's fancied gem.

But it could matter. Time has seen
The evil legion turned aside
By Vercingetorix or mean
Bushmen defending each his bride;
Has seen the legion, evil still,
Bear health and order among men
Noble, no doubt, and of good will,
Who fought in vain for swamp and fen;
And all that ever came of death
Tilling its human acreage,
Was only all we breathe with breath
Or infants have for heritage.
The world, if it was built at all,
Stands on the depths to which men fall.

Before you bow to worship flesh
As martyr if the blood is shed,
Observe, my friend, the subtle mesh
In which men catch men not yet dead.
Mark the constricting cords of hate,
The ropes of privilege and pride,
The threads of lying, the irate
Thongs that indifference has tied.
Before you call death worse than life,
In whose long struggle many die,
Look if there be not in that strife
A hand too few, too pure an eye—
Which seeing only its dear peace,
Requires the warfare for it cease.

✲ IV ✲

COMMON DENOMINATOR

NOTHING stays white and nothing black.
The fair page, the painted stack—
Grime grays one and sun the other.
Vice and virtue age together.

THE VOWS

AFTER the impulsive serenade,
The self-derision.
After the decision is made,
The indecision—

As a man who flings himself from a high cliff
Into empty air
Has then a free moment to spend wondering if
People will care.

HOW WAS THE SHOW?

In the movie I just saw
Lechery was matched with Law,
But was punished for her sins.
Evil never, never wins.

She was more seductive than
Innocence, who got the Man.
You could see, in brief arrests,
Sin's demarked and hungry breasts.

Sometimes, when she looked her lust,
She evoked a sort of trust.
That was part of the dire scheme.
Honor moved as in a dream.

Then you saw the plot resolved.
Dazzled Man was disinvolved
By a stratagem of Good.
God prevailed in Hollywood.

THE GOD ERRANT

In the detective story, the hero, or at least the central
figure,
Who is immortal, though often in danger of death,
Is invited, sometimes, by women, both sinful and virtuous.
He always fades out, however, undetainable as breath.

The immortal is not to be trammeled by home won to
(even heaven),
Nor are we to behold him enjoying what comes easily to
hand.
Mere clay would envy him Danaë, but not understand.

What we are told, in full, is the hard part: it stretches the
muscles
Of the mind admiring his hazards overcome;
Displays the champion, and through him we unravel
Every puzzle but one, but are not given the sum:

We are left in the dark still as to whence he is immortal,
And why his history shows him never at rest—
In no chaste bed pillowed ever, nor long on a wicked
breast.

KENILWORTH STAIRWAY

SWEET in new sense and taste with tongue conspiring
And unpredictable monuments of lust,
The fertile skill contriving its own death
Penetrates farther than its easy faring.
Beyond the last directions it can trust
It drives its exploration and wants breath.

The sensual curve that nightliness describes
And is described by flesh avoiding spirit
Returns upon itself at a lower level,
Becomes the matter of occasional jibes
At appetites not adequate nor near it,
And is becoming regular and evil.

Irony contemplates and is not pleased,
However devious grows the plain device
Coined once to keep touch warm and tangle supple.
The body perhaps not, and the mind not eased,
The surrogate for love and primary choice
Tosses the covers of the married couple. . . .

And oh, what phantoms not limited in number
Preclude the onset of a genuine slumber. . . .

TRISTAN IN BRITTANY

None of this was destined to go well.
There was always the practical thought that duty lay
Where the mores fixed it; that one should not live for
the day
Only, but pattern his life to steer clear of hell.
There was always the voice of conscience, and minor ties,
And amenities whose effect was dulcificatory,
Such as the small dinner, the exchange in the conserva-
tory,
One's husband's friends, one's wife's amusing replies.

It is odd how closely the facts approximate
The course of fiction, as still sometimes purveyed
In monthly instalments (She decides she will not leave
him—
She really loved him once, and it isn't too late).
No need to say that either was afraid:
But Love is blind—it is easy to deceive him.

THE VIRTUES

To THE chaste woman men are a sea of faces.
She looks at none of them. She never knows
Which of the many watch her as she goes.

The unchaste man sees women as a sea,
And every wave a gulf to draw him down.
He tosses chartless in the burning sun;
Under the meaningless stars he dies of thirst,
Or drinks the salty water and goes mad.

The chaste man and the unchaste woman wed
May sleep together naked in one bed
And blend such lives as fate decrees for each—
Whom she might lure, if he could only teach.

A LEASE SURRENDERED

You need not tell me now
Why the brave vow
Faltered before its term
And held not firm.

Of old I know your tale.
Of small avail
Are the familiar vows
In a strange house.

I know as well as you
(I lived there, too)
What shadow fills the halls
When the night falls.

I know the quiet breath,
Not unlike death,
That moves from room to room
In the long gloom.

I know the empty space,
And the grave face
Of silence without bound,
And the still sound.

Indeed, what time I dwelled
There, I too felled
Foemen in number known
To me alone.

THE MADMAN

FIRKINS agreed with the court that he was mad.
He insisted on filing an objection, though,
To the trivial grounds on which it found him so.
How was it crazy to go about unclad
When he had shed his body long ago?
His real dementia, which no one knew he had,
Was a queer impression of feeling cold in snow.

CABINET WITH MIRROR

HERE where my unguents, pills, and salves
Are stacked on sanitary shelves,
My day, divided in two halves,
Brings face to face my naked selves.

One is the shaved, proficient one
That goes forth dressed to rule the world.
The other, home when that is done,
Enters a bathroom tiled and pearled.

The one looks in, the other out.
The doses ready in their place
Allay the itching skin of doubt.
And in this bowl I wash my face.

MARRIAGE, OR THE GIST OF SWEDENBORG

THE MASKS that pass for you and me
Are not the souls of accuracy.
They often seem to represent
A virtuous or good intent;
Whereas we know our motives are
Simpler than that and worse by far:
To bend each other to our wills,
And come off master though it kills.

And yet these masks from day to day
Present an unctuous, noble play,
With, "By your leave," or, "How doth speed
Your most ill health? your heart's best need?"
Or, "Nay, my lord, I'll do my task,"
Or, "Pray, good lady, what dost ask?"

So each two persons in his self
Conceals, and dodges like an elf
From berry-bush to poison-tree:
I for my grandeur, you for me.

✲V✲

THREE POEMS FROM A DEFENSE PLANT

THE FABRIC

In quick coupés and fast sedans
The special movement that is man's
Explores a city day and night
And wears the black macadam bright,
While month by month beneath the tread
Of engines rolling overhead,
A million metal trifles lie
And are inlaid beyond the eye—
Except it be cast gutterward
And idle there with the absurd.

Then in that oily stone behold
Mosaic set like teeth with gold—
The cotterpin, the nut, the nail,
The bottlecap, the bucket-bail,
The bolt, the washer, the unknown
And shapeless morsel dropped or thrown,
Flung off, discarded, kicked at, caught
And pounded down without a thought—
All such lost things as now are found
Embedded in a granite ground.

The pavement beaten by the wheels
Of haste and circumstance conceals
The integral small parts cast off
By the machines of strife and love.

AB URBE CONDITA

THE ANTS with wings are temporarily lifted
Above their plane. I am told they seek new homes.
Many a man as unaccountably gifted
Excites an admiration while he roams:

Then where he pauses, lights; and there is built
Turmoil, the city of our toil and guilt.

THE DIMENSIONS

THE CRANE, the craneway and the ground,
The car, the rising hook it carries,
Together definitely bound
A space where only empty air is;

Through which expanse, by any course
However devious or twisted,
The object swung by mortal force
May travel light and unresisted.

There point and line and plane compound
A curve as various as sound.

If through the three dimensions borne
The humble or dread steel may pass
And deviate at will to scorn
Collisions desperate as glass,

What journeys might the soul not fly—
Or the unbounded, longing eye?

STILL LIFE

COILED in the sunlight blistering the plaza,
Penned in a box of wood and window-glass,
The carnival python sleeps. Its posture has the
Repose attributable to a snake of brass.

Its skin, colored like the leaf-carpet under oaks,
Glistens where flies crawl on it undisturbed.
The barker alternately invites the crowd and smokes,
Proprietor of the means by which the serpent is curbed.

The glass feels solid to the snake.
He does not know the glass will break.

LINES FOR PONCE DE LEON

I.

How shall we love, who in our minds recall
When flesh was God but all the leaves must fall?
For we look back and yearn upon the young,
While they are deaf to any golden tongue.

The young shall never see in the gray hair,
Contemporaneous, what times were there.

Ageless at forty, as at eighty fade
The virgin kiss and the approaching spade,
The lovers of their past in thought behold
Each ravished hope bestowing happy gold—

There glows the youth unscrupulously strong,
And the cool maid his burning length along.

Then, when in retrospect or in their dreams
The old grow young, the young grow real as day,
Almost the moment its exemplar seems;
But now they lack the will and want the way.

Knowing so well what it was like to live,
They still would have what now no death can give.

II.

Since in the shapes of memory no love
Survives except as touching mind and heart,
Because the member in its human glove
Lasts but a moment and forgets the part;

Or since the man whose appetite was sound
Hungers no more when death by famine nears;
And the lost music of the constant round
Ceases when ocean dances in his ears;

Or, lastly, since, from war by time withdrawn,
The peaceful soldier dotes on noble foes,
Counting what generals crimsoned a green lawn
To make him wear the medal history knows;

And all the wounds are weary only when
The maggot still in raw flesh weaves and thrives,
But those who live are the surviving men,
And the hurt brain feels normal all their lives:

Therefore, my love, and you who for me fought,
Forget the cost—for thus I prove it nought.

Yet once suppose the past came sudden back—
The bed in the bright garret now resumed
Its stolen burden, and the jungle track
Teemed as before with all the strong and doomed:

Might those young ghosts their violent hours unfold,
Still could I not, who even then was old.

III.

In former days when man would sleep with woman,
Memorable forever was the intoxication thereof—
The boy's imagination learning to be human,
The man's wishes at home with the body of love.

As we grow older every story seems
To become a legend. There are many that we know,
And all useful in the interpretation of dreams.
The hunchback stranger, the lantern in the falling snow,
The destinable aisles of the forest—all now conspire
As if toward refuge, when no more the warm
Hope of good health shall stand to us as fire,
Nor the body as shelter in the natural storm.

Now you will say to yourself, "Quick, quick! Find the
answer
Before the clock changes, the shadow sweeping
Over the meadow is gone like a wicked dancer,
Or an old man bent double with recollection
Is found wandering in the market, snuffling and weeping."

But there is no answer; only your own reflection.

COLOPHON . . *This book has been designed and printed by Carroll Coleman at The Prairie Press in Iowa City. The type is hand set Bulmer, and twelve hundred and fifty copies have been printed on Linweave Town Crier Text.*

(*Continued from front flap*)

MYRON HENRY BROOMELL is a Bostonian by birth and—to paraphrase his own words—by temperament as well. He is a descendant, however, of John Broomall, or Broomhall, who came in 1682 to Pennsylvania, where the family lived and maintained their Quaker affiliations until the time of Broomell's grandparents.

"My father and my maternal grandfather, in addition to business pursuits," says Broomell, "were Swedenborgian clergymen. The combination of that ethical and mystical teaching with my mother's deep regard for her alma mater, Smith College, helped to determine a trend in my literary and cultural affections, and I quite naturally followed what is called a classical education.

"I had proper instruction in the schools of Texas and Massachusetts and at the state universities of Colorado, California, and Ohio, and in the course of earning a living I passed from the teaching of Latin to the teaching of history, and then to the practice of accounting and applied administrative law."

Broomell now lives in Los Angeles.

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